



## When the Local Is Transnational: Time-Space, Conflict and Community (Re)construction Within Polish-Jewish Émigrés' Diaspora

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## **When the Local Is Transnational: Time-Space, Conflict and Community (Re)construction Within Polish-Jewish Émigrés' Diaspora**

This paper looks at the interrelationship of “local” and “global” in experiences of people who left Poland following antisemitic purges and politics of racial hatred carried under the guise of government-sponsored “anti-Zionist” campaign of March 1968. Following student protests, legitimacy crisis of the ruling Polish United Workers’ Party, factional struggles in the Party, and facing the worsening of a situation of the Jewish minority (at least since the 1967 “six day war”), up to 20 thousand Jews or Poles of Jewish descent left Poland stigmatized in an atmosphere of “symbolic pogrom” (Stola 2000: 149)<sup>1</sup>. Forced to discard their Polish citizenship, break community and family ties and displace their daily routines and life plans, these émigrés or refugees faced not only typical migrant realities of struggling for their social, economic, political and cultural status in new countries (and many of them would later change their place again), but also questions of how to survive as a community, how to maintain social bonds and a sense of dignity in a changed situation. Based on author’s empirical research<sup>2</sup>, the article is both a complex yet limited monographic endeavor and an attempt to show what types of stakes are significant when one is compelled to think in terms of identity. The author analyzes how identity and community reconstruction endeavors are structured by logics of historical events, political-cultural definitions of loyalty and belonging, as well as contemporary diasporic conditions. While situated in spatial/structural and temporal contexts, these practices are seen as spontaneous learning processes responding to tensions between individual and community and between communities. By using critical concepts of cultural sociology, the author

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<sup>1</sup> The events and their immediate aftermath – the exodus of Polish Jewry – have been discussed by a number of historians, e.g.: Eisler 1991, 2006; Oseka 1999; Stola 2000; Banas 1979; Checinski 1982; Starnawski 2002, 2008.

<sup>2</sup> The research was based on 69 in-depth interviews with émigrés who left Poland in late 1960’s and early 1970’s. The members of the studied group were born in 1938-1955, mostly as children of the Holocaust survivors, and they currently live in Scandinavia (Denmark and Sweden), Israel, North America (the U.S. and Canada), Western Europe (France, Britain, Germany), Australia and Costa Rica. Most interviews were taken in 2001-2003. Other research material consisted of immigrant press, published memoirs and, in several cases, personal email correspondence.

tries to evaluate both possibilities and inevitable oppressive effects of the particular time-space and notions of community.

## **Theoretical framework**

Critical sociological approach to identity, although it might take an individual and his or her biographical experience as a departing point, emphasizes both social processes of identity production/creation and multiple contexts of those processes. It includes structural and institutional settings, power relations and ideologies as well as everyday discourses that “normalize” and “popularize” social images of what is “common” and what is “different”, and situates them within various histories and biographies, therefore combining *synchronic* and *diachronic* dimensions in the process of making sense of phenomena related to the notion of identity. Such an approach is anti-essentialist or constructionist in the sense that it does not aim at finding certain relatively stable (or “core”) social, cultural or natural features of individuals, groups or larger collectivities. Instead, it focuses on how existing symbolic categories (such as group names and other signifiers of identification) emerge within histories (that include both historical “turning points”, such as disasters, wars, mass migrations etc. as well as long-term processes) and structures (that are both social-relational and symbolic), and how histories/structures are in turn influenced or shaped by people using those identification categories in private-personal or public-political practices. In other words, constructionist approach to identity research used here, attempts at capturing dynamics of creation of specific types of individual’s and group’s “self-knowledge” or “autode finition” based on formation of notions of “Us/Them”. This focus is present in Richard Jenkins’ (1999: 4) definition of “social identity” as “the ways in which individuals and collectivities are distinguished in their social relations with other individuals and collectivities. It is the systematic establishment and signification, between individuals, between collectivities, and between individuals and collectivities, of relationships of similarity and difference. Taken – as they can only be – together, similarity and difference are the dynamic principles of identity, the heart of social life (...)”.

Identity as a principle of socially constructed reality is therefore a result of individuals’ and collectivities’ actions and/or strategies (more or less purposefully undertaken), as well as an effect of objective social relations, institutional settings and discourses that shape two aspects of identity formation processes: identification (individual’s or group’s own establishment and signification of similarity/difference) and categorization (person’s or group’s external identification by others) (cf. Jenkins 1999: 23). This process-oriented and dialectical nature of identity formation can be

understood in terms of the individual and the collective. The former will be understood as *socio-cultural individual identity*, and the latter as *collective identity*. However, since not simply the subjective expressions of identity, but rather historical-structural conditions of identity construction are to be emphasized, it seems necessary to problematize the notion of **identification field**. It can be understood as a historically emerging symbolic and structural-relational space – encompassing communication processes, power relations (domination/resistance) and related competing systems of knowledge and meanings (discourses, symbolic universes), as well as political strategies – where identity categories are produced, diversified, positioned, hierarchized, institutionalized, imposed and resisted, which are the basis of identification/categorization. In other words, identification field is a structured and structuring range of “identity options” or “categorical identities”; a framework for identity-formation strategies; a context of identification/categorization processes that refer and relate to those pre-defined “options” and include attempts to reinterpret and/or subvert those “options” in various ways. Identification field is a space of social relations and cultural meanings. It is, on the one hand, a specific dimension of social relational field, as understood by Bourdieu: “a network or configuration of objective relations between positions” defined “objectively through the fact that they exist and through conditions that they impose on persons or institutions that occupy them, defining their actual and potential situation in a structure of distribution of various types of power (or capital)” (Bourdieu, Wacquant 2001: 78; translated from Polish edition). On the other hand, identification fields can be defined as a configuration of discourses that form a symbolic-institutional order (cf. Foucault 1977: 50-51; Sériot 1994: 138) and a system of power/knowledge (Foucault 1998; Hall 1996b: 203-4), and serve as symbolic universes legitimizing “socially objectivated and subjectively real” meanings of similarity and difference in the social world (cf. Berger, Luckmann 1967: 95-104)<sup>3</sup>. Such a conceptualization of identification field seems in line with Stuart Hall’s notion of identity as a “suture” between “on the one hand the discourses and practices which attempt to ‘interpellate’, speak to us or hail us into place as the social subjects of particular discourses, and on the other hand, the processes which produce subjectivities, which construct us as subjects which can be ‘spoken’. Identities are thus points of temporary attachment to the subject positions which discursive practices construct for us” (Hall 1996c: 5-6).

Trying to understand how identification field “works”, it seems important to emphasize two types of its “effects” that make identity – that is, relational processes of similarity/difference

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<sup>3</sup> As Stuart Hall argues, cultural or national identities are always created and transformed within representations and in relation to them (1996a: 612); they are always constructed within discourse, not outside it (ibid. 1996c: 4).

establishment and signification – important in social situations. One such type can be called a *menace effect*, and another effect is that of *identity resources* being a factor or stake in power, influence or recognition processes within a given community. The category of menace effect echoes conceptions of identity ranging from classical theories of identity crisis to analyses of stigmatization (Goffman 1963) or research on strategies of dealing with threatened identities (cf. Melchior 1990: 47-54). However, to go beyond psychological and social-psychological approaches and account on the historical-structural dynamic it seems useful to view menace effects as a result or anticipated potentiality of social conflicts that create a sense of threat in individuals or groups and set processes of similarity/difference establishment and signification in motion. It is a given social situation defined by its participants – individuals, groups or institutions – as a threat or menace that makes thinking and acting “through” identity relevant and often necessary. It may be, for example, a matter of mobilization of identity by a threatened group/individual, reactivation of endangered sense of distinctiveness or a counter-reaction to social processes of marginalization or discrimination based on certain pre-defined, e.g. institutionally, notions of identity<sup>4</sup>.

Another category, *identity resources* draws on Bourdieu’s notions of cultural capital (e.g. knowledge, various types of cultural competence) and “social capital” (one’s links and contacts with others in certain positions), which are understood as forms of symbolic capital produced and reproduced in a given social field (cf. Bourdieu, Wacquant 2001: 79, 104-105). This form of capital refers to relations and processes of similarity/difference establishment and signification in the context of a given identification field, and it includes any cultural content or any social relations, linkages and experiences that are significant for the processes of identification and categorization. As stated above, these cultural contents and/or social links might constitute a factor or even a stake in processes of identity recognition or in attempts at exclusion based on a notion of “adequate” competence, “legitimate” biography, “right” loyalty etc. It is usually over these notions that the actual definition of identity as a result of similarity/difference dynamics is constituted, resisted or transformed.

Identification field is not only a structural (i.e. structured and structuring) reality. It has also a temporal dimension, which might refer to biographic experiences as well as to broader historical processes constitutive of the range of the actually existing “identity options”. It is through history and historical transformations of power/knowledge that subjects are formed (Foucault 1998: 29). Just like

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<sup>4</sup> Defined in this way, social situations of threat/menace are of course dynamic and can be treated as having gradual intensity. They can also be analyzed both in “objective” (via social and cultural conditions of identity processes) and “subjective” (via experiences and situational definitions by social actors) sense.

identity is a “suture” between structures and subject positions, it can also be seen as a link between history and biography. Representations that constitute identities are indeed never established once for ever, but reflect historicity of their formation, including sudden historical events or broader social transformations that are always necessary frames of biographical experiences, whether acknowledged, rejected or silenced in particular narratives.

To take account of a transnational context of identity and community formation and reconstruction, the further analysis will be situated in the notion of diaspora that is understood as a *situation of dispersal* of a certain collectivity sharing common historical experiences (especially the genesis of this dispersal) and forming a network of social relations, which crosses boundaries of more than one country. By drawing on Avtar Brah’s (1996) concept of *diaspora space*, this notion departs from classical approaches that distinguished between diasporic community and its actual or imagined homeland. As suggested by Brah, diaspora space is “inhabited” “not only by those who have emigrated and their descendants, but equally by those who are constructed and represented as indigenous”. As opposed to the conventional use of the term diaspora, *diaspora space* “includes the entanglement, the intertwining of the genealogies of dispersion with those of ‘staying put’” (p. 209). The notion of diaspora and an analysis of a diasporic situation have, due to their focus on policentric transnational condition of community and culture, a particularly strong potential for demonstrating dynamics of identification field, as well as changeability and plurality of identity representations<sup>5</sup>. “The concept of diaspora delineates a field of identifications where ‘imagined communities’ are forged within and out of a confluence of narratives from annals of collective memory and re-memory” (ibid. 196).

### **Time-Space in identity/community construction**

Assuming the historical dimension of the diasporic identification field, in order to make sense of similarity/difference dynamics one needs to trace not merely current temporality of a given community, but the past, in which this dynamic is grounded. Therefore an analysis of forms and content of individual and group definitions concentrated around ethnic-national and cultural categories will, in the case of Polish-Jewish community, have to pose a problem of historical formation of a variety of modern notions of “Polishness” and “Jewishness” and attempt at explaining

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<sup>5</sup> For other theoretical and empirical analyses of diaspora undertaken from the perspective of this new “paradigm”, see for example: D. Boyarin, J. Boyarin 1993; Clifford 1994; Gilroy 1993, 1997; Hall 1994; Anthias 1998.

why these categories have been treated as distinctively separate or even contradictory. In other words, to account for the diachronic of contemporary identity and community construction, one has to ask why modern national-cultural formation on Polish territories since the second half of 19<sup>th</sup> century – including the period of partitioned Poland, the interwar Polish statehood in the years 1918-1939, the second world war, the communist period afterwards with its use of nationalist discourse and antisemitism (under the guise of “anti-Zionism” and with references to Jews’ alleged “double loyalty”) around 1967-68, as well as in contemporary period – failed to integrate Jewish community not simply into the structures of the state<sup>6</sup> but into the social fabric and symbolic imagination of Polish national community<sup>7</sup>. Attempting to address this problem one has to look at decades-long processes of Jewish emancipation and assimilation, the impact of modern antisemitism (often taking form of racialism) on shaping European notions of “national culture”, the role of modern nation-state and capitalism in institutionalization of identity categories and legitimization of exclusionary politics based on them (see Arendt 1973; Bauman 1989, 1991) and the emergence of modern national and nationalist discourses, ideologies and institutions (including Polish and Jewish nationalist movements and their political, cultural and religious references)<sup>8</sup>. This historical analysis of modern interpretations of identity categories should, in other words, capture the processes of constructing social consciousness and their immediate and long-term results: transgenerational and multigenerational learning of one’s place in a community (here: ethnic-national and/or religious) and this community’s place in a broader society.

Experiences of post-World War II generation of Polish Jews vis-a-vis identity formation processes can be characterized in terms of both specific identity resources and menace effects of identification field. Destruction of more than 90 percent of prewar Jewish population led to substantial breaking of transgenerational channels of culture learning. The generation gap as well as specific forms of modernization and secularization under the state-socialist regime strengthened tendencies

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<sup>6</sup> Actually such formal equality was declared from the onset of Polish Second Republic (1919).

<sup>7</sup> Another question relates to economic integration. Despite Polish nationalists’ claims concerning the competition against Jewish merchants and artisans over the “national purity” of economy (one of the founding slogans of modern antisemitism) in late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Jews had by no means been a “foreign” element in economic structure (both under feudal farm economy and in capitalist system) but an integral (even though specifically located as a “middleman minority”) part of it, of a centuries-long significance (cf. Bronsztejn 1963, Hertz 1988). The same can be said about the Jews’ role in facilitating and contributing to development of Polish modern culture, including literary and artistic production (Hertz 2004). The fact that in popular imagination both these questions are up until today perceived largely through nationalist lenses only adds to credibility of posing the problem of explaining *why* and *how* Poles and Jews came to remain separate communities with separate identities, the “border cases” of assimilating Jews being treated either as problematic or marginal.

towards assimilation of young Jews and caused a shift from postfigurative culture of earlier generations (based predominantly on beliefs and traditions of Judaism as well as on Yiddish language) towards cofigurative one<sup>9</sup>. This shift had indeed started partially already in the generation that came of age in the 1920's and 1930's, and was related to an objective deepening of linguistic and cultural assimilation (despite growing structural and identificational rift between the Jews and non-Jewish Poles, and intensification of antisemitism in public sphere in the mid-1930's) as well as with Jewish religion to be replaced with emancipation ideologies of socialism, communism and modern Jewish nationalism in its Zionist or Bundist forms. New forms of identity resources as the basis of community creation were an effect of those processes. Liquidation of Jewish plural political life and marginalization of religious life since the late 1940's, relatively large support for the new socio-economic system<sup>10</sup>, and subsequent emigration waves (1945-47, 1949-50, 1957-59) of majority of the Jews who survived the Holocaust, dramatically transformed social and cultural landscape of the Jewish community. Apart from the remaining informal social contacts among families identifying as Jews or Poles of Jewish descent, as well as rather residual forms of traditional and/or religious life (mainly in working- or middle-class families), there were mainly secular forms of communal life under the institutional roof of the state-linked Social and Cultural Society of the Jews (TSKŻ), such as youth clubs and holiday camps and Jewish schools in several cities.

The menace effects of the post-WWII identification field should be seen in two dimensions: their temporal location in the past, present and future and their intensity ("ordinary", "medium-range" and "extermination-oriented" according to Sitek's (1996: 13) classification). Temporal dimension related first of all to "retrospective" trauma of the young Jews parents' as Holocaust survivors, and can even today be seen as one of the most significant constitutive elements in identity formation processes<sup>11</sup>. Notwithstanding the variety of intergenerational transmission modes of this retrospective trauma (parents could have been more or less opened about their past or completely silent), this was a specific experience that, together with a loss of older relatives during the war, could differentiate one from his or her non-Jewish peers. As interviewees say:

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<sup>8</sup> For macrohistorical and sociological analyses of Polish-Jewish identification field, see Cała (1989) and Hertz (1988) for the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Mendelsohn (1983) for the interwar Poland, Melchior (1994) for the Holocaust period, and Steinlauf (1997) for post-World War II decades.

<sup>9</sup> On the concept of postfigurative, cofigurative and prefigurative types of cultural transmission see Mead (1970).

<sup>10</sup> However Jews' support for communism or state socialism should not be overestimated and mythologized, the relatively enthusiastic approach in the immediate post-WWII years can be explained in social and psychological terms as an expression of hopes for a democratic society without antisemitism and social injustice. These hopes were certainly easy to activate following the horrors of the persecution of the Jews during the Nazi occupation of Poland.

<sup>11</sup> On the second generation trauma, see: Epstein 1988, Cooper 1995, Hass 1996, Wiszniewicz 1999.



- The experiences of our parents – their experiences of the Holocaust – had a fundamental influence on our Jewishness.
- For me as a little child, being a Jew consisted in the fact that one did not have a grandmother or a grandfather.
- When I was little, I had a complex because the fact that I didn't have a grandmother meant that I was a Jew. Well, who else didn't have anybody? Only Jews.

One example shows in a particularly strong way that this traumatic experience of the second generation of survivors was a reminder of the fate of extermination:

- I am a child of people who survived, people intended for destruction like rotten cattle (...) I think that for our generation, born after 1945, the fact that we are the children of survivors weighs more heavily than emigration [in 1968].

The actual (present) and anticipated (future or potential) aspects of temporality of menace effects were related to various forms of antisemitic stigmatization: alienation in a predominantly Catholic environment, stereotyping as well as overt verbal or physical violence. In one of the interviewees' narrative reconstructions of those past experiences, someone said that "antisemitism was like the air" and numerous stories referred to daily-life incidents at school, in a neighborhood or at work, which contributed to strengthening the sense of "otherness". The presence of antisemitism as an external factor that influenced their sense of being different<sup>12</sup> was acknowledged by virtually all the interviewees, and antisemitism of 1968 was of particularly great significance since for at least some of the younger generation Jews in deeply assimilated families the discovery of their antisemitism went parallel with discovering their own Jewish identity. For many, this stigmatization by the state authorities, public institutions and masses of people (frequently including their own neighbors or even friends!)<sup>13</sup> not only had impact on their perception of political regime, but also made them "rethink themselves" in relation to the broader society and their links to Jewishness. Processes of similarity/difference signification and establishment became very meaningful, and in some cases revealed what one's ethnic ancestry was. Thus they constituted a specific form of "initiation" to Jewishness (Melchior 1990: 135-8). As two short statements show:

- In 1967-68, for the first time in my life, I needed to know who was a Jew and who was not, because I had to feel secure.
- I had never identified with Jews, but in 1968 it became clear that it concerned me too.

In such an atmosphere not infrequently threats were anticipated even though one's particular situation was not necessarily that of immediate danger. This anticipation was a result of a general

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<sup>12</sup> On the impact of antisemitism on person's identification as a Jew see a classical text by Sartre (1987: 69).

<sup>13</sup> Antisemitic hatred in March 1968 can be characterized in terms of Sitek's medium-range menace that is more intensive than "ordinary" informal pressures as it includes their "formalization and institutionalization, e.g. in a form of state coercive apparatus's pressure on a minority group, which leads of

climate of fear and a sense of “lack of future” in Poland. Following the “March ’68 events” 15-20,000 people left Poland between spring 1968 and early 1970’s<sup>14</sup>. Polish-Jewish writer Henryk Grynberg (1968) wrote in Paris-based journal *Kultura*: “1968 is the year of expulsion of Jews from Poland, a year when the phenomenon known as Polish Jewry ended – and we should realize this fact”.

Contrary to Grynberg’s pessimistic view at the time, one can see that the recent decade or so witnessed not only a revival of Jewish life, however a small-scale, in Poland<sup>15</sup>, but also a revival of the community of post-1968 émigrés. This revival can be perceived as distinctly immigrant type of learning experience. It goes, however, beyond learning processes typical for most immigrants, such as language acquisition, search for education and jobs, establishing contacts in new social circles, getting to know laws and customs of a country etc. As a historian notices on the example of Denmark: “Complexity of psychological-cultural situation of 1969-1974 migrants to Denmark was an important factor inspiring self-organization of Polish Jews. This factor was perhaps more important than social and living conditions or adaptation” (Olszewski 1993). Already in mid-1970s early attempts at reconstruction of a disintegrated and displaced community were taken by a group of people who established Coordination Committee for Activities for Polish-Jewish Youth in Scandinavia (CC). The CC had two autonomous organizations: in Denmark and in Sweden. Among its goals were: promotion of cultural activity among Jewish youth from Poland in Scandinavia (via seminars, meeting etc.), preservation of Jewish culture, especially history and traditions of Polish Jews (via educational work), mobilization of Jewish youth from Poland to support the State of Israel in the struggle for its security and survival, establishing social contacts and cooperation with Jewish or other organizations to pursue these goals (ibid. 1993: 461)<sup>16</sup>.

For two decades following the post-March ’68 exodus, Polish borders were essentially closed for those Jews who wanted to re-emigrate, even if only temporarily, e.g. to attend one’s

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course to threatening the minority’s economic existence, and is realized by the refusal of religious or educational rights and by displacement of whole large groups” (1996: 13).

<sup>14</sup> A sociologist Julian Ilicki, who pioneered the study of the March ’68 migrants in Sweden, estimated the distribution of the migration cohort: Sweden – over 2,500, Denmark – 3-3,500, Israel (official data, 1967-72) – 3,800; information from the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (immigration mainly to the U.S.) – approx. 10,000, and some 2,000 émigrés outside Scandinavia and Israel who were not assisted by the HIAS; total number estimated 20-22,000 (6,000 in Scandinavia, 4,000 in Israel, 12,000 the rest of the world). Data provided in a personal correspondence in 2002; cf. Starnawski 2008: 125-6.

<sup>15</sup> Perhaps a phenomenon much more meaningful in terms of its range is intensification of Jewish-style cultural production (including music, books etc.) by non-Jews. On this process in the broader European context see Gruber (2002).

<sup>16</sup> Two organizations that were active among older generation of Jewish immigrants from Poland in Denmark were: Union of Polish Jews (since 1971), later renamed Union of Jews from Poland, and the Jewish Socialists BUND (also since 1971). See Olszewski 1993: 453-61.

relatives' funeral<sup>17</sup>. 1989 was a significant turning point in this spatial-temporal constitution of diaspora space, since it brought a new situation where various forms of social exchange between the transnational migrant community and Poland/Jews in Poland became possible. A symbolic moment was Polish president's apology and acknowledgment of March '68 victims on the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 1998. A number of émigrés from various countries attended events in Warsaw commemorating the anniversary. Another significant point in time seems 2000/2001. In Poland it was a year of a fierce debate on past and present Polish-Jewish relations and antisemitism, provoked by Jan T. Gross' book *Neighbours*. Most people interviewed in spring 2001 would refer to the book and to numerous articles and commentaries appearing in the Polish press and in the cyberspace. In July 2001 a group of Polish-Jewish émigrés laid wreaths on the site of the 1941 pogrom in the town of Jedwabne.

But 2000/2001 was also a time of the second Intifada on the Palestinian territories occupied by Israel, the time when terrorist attacks against Israeli civilians intensified, and then the events of 9/11, which were at least partially seen not simply in terms of the "clash of civilizations" but as a sign that an assault on the Jewish people is possible wherever they are. These geopolitical contexts, along with the neoconservative coalition of the United States and Israel in the "war on terrorism", affected tendencies towards a spread of new forms of pro-Israeli sentiments, including overt manifestations of nationalism, such as participation in the demonstrations in support of the State of Israel (for instance in Denmark or Sweden), as well as defending Israeli state politics towards the Palestinians in the internet debates or in workplace conversations.

Three factors had a particularly significant impact on the community reconstruction as a transnational network in 1990's and beyond: the emergence of reunion meetings since late 1980's, publication of the *Biuletyn Reunion '68* magazine since 1994, and establishment and further development of internet discussion groups from the late the 1990's. The reunion meetings, the largest being organized every 3-4 years in Israel and the smaller ones in Scandinavia, Western Europe or among Polish Jews in the United States, allow for the reestablishment of relationships from the past, especially to connect with those who are remembered as friends from the Jewish summer camps or Jewish schools of 1950's and 1960's. In fact, both the organizers and participants claim that the reunions are to revive the generational in-group links, and some of those meetings are actually called "summer camps" (*kolonie*) just like some 50 years ago. They also claim that *Reunion '68* is by no means meant as an institutionalized organizational form, but rather a zone of contact, a

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<sup>17</sup> According to some interviewees there was overt discrimination against Polish Jews who settled in Sweden even after they received Swedish citizenship. Polish Jews were harassed by the Polish border

site of learning, unlearning and relearning, i.e. a space to link and to confront: the present with the past; the Jewish (identification) with the Polish (culture, language) and with the Israeli (dominant political orientation in relation to “Jewish politics” both in Israel and in other areas of post-1968 diasporic space); the particular (generational experience and individual biographies) with the semi-universal (broader notions of Jewish fate) and with universal (transnational positioning of families, ongoing displacements due to professional mobility, as well as a search for stability).

The start of the immigrant journal *Biuletyn Reunion '68* greatly facilitated this process of reintegration in the mid-1990's<sup>18</sup>. Together with internet groups that developed around 1997-98, the bulletin has constituted a basis for intercontinental integration of Polish-speaking Jewish individuals and families, providing an open but “boundary-assumed” space for debates on cultural and ethnic identity matters (negotiating meanings of “Jewishness” vis-a-vis Polish “cultural base”; reestablishing approach to Jewish tradition etc.), historical interpretations of biographical experiences, diverse narratives on history, as well as contemporary political issues. Apart from the bulletin there is also an online magazine called *Plotkies* (Rumors) that serves a similar purpose as a site where retrospective voices and new discourses interact.

There are now three major internet discussion groups and even though they split somewhat around personal tensions, they all constitute a “localizing” or “homing” space, which is perhaps best reflected by their names: Common Room (*Świetlica*)<sup>19</sup>, Small Island (*Wysepka*) and Little Square (*Skwerek*). One interviewee described her discovery the internet-mediated contacts with an enthusiasm shared by many others:

- I met a friend of mine (...) whom I hadn't seen for more than thirty years, and he told me that there is this “Small Island”. So I logged in and we started to talk. With the whole world. So it turned out that I knew this person and another, I listened here and listened there, and I told myself that it is high time we should get together again.

All these forms of reintegration are also sites of creating or recreating a new collective *habitus* – they provide participants with a space of learning, as well as enable *and shape* cultural, political and generational expression in a friendly and understanding environment. As an interviewee

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authorities while non-Jewish Poles were not treated this way. Presumably there existed some ethnicity-based personal index (in practice, a racist tool of exclusion).

<sup>18</sup> According to one of the most active participants in this process of reintegration, in 1998 the *Reunion '68* address list had some 5 thousand names, which constituted probably about 80 percent of people who in late 1990's were then in their fifties (Kantor 1998). In the fall of 1995 the editors of *Biuletyn Reunion '68* sent out 1350 copies throughout the world: 388 to the U.S., 209 to Israel, 171 to Denmark, 163 to Sweden, 135 to Australia, 97 to countries in Western Europe, 90 to Canada, 34 to Poland, and 1 copy per country to Brazil, Hong Kong and Venezuela (*Biuletyn Reunion '68*, no. 2, fall 1995).

<sup>19</sup> *Świetlica* was the first internet discussion group. It started in March 1997 and by the end of the same year it had some 200 list members (*Biuletyn Reunion '68*, no. 5, winter 1997/98).

said, reunions are “a symbolic substitution of a broader family”. Another person, a woman living in Germany, interviewed during the 2002 reunion in Ashkelon, described the meeting in a similar way:

- This is my world (...) This meeting here is my homeland. (...) We had a common upbringing in Poland, we speak the same language, well... I don't simply mean Polish but that we use the same citations, we know the same songs, most of us participated in Jewish summer camps while in Poland (...) so they really know each other from the childhood times. Another thing we have in common is the fact that we have been expelled from Poland, we experienced a shock of expulsion. Most people emigrated to the same places, like Sweden or Denmark where they live close to each other and they continue the traditions: they organized similar summer camps for their children.

### **What stakes appear in community reconstruction?**

The final part of this analysis takes a look at various implications of this transnational development of a community among Polish-Jewish émigrés of the “March '68 generation”. Three such areas are taken into account: constitution of diasporic forms of social cohesion through mutual aid networks, emerging in-group and out-group tensions over definition and interpretation of identity resources (primarily, definitions of “Jewishness”), and the actual valorizations of some of the past and present interpretations in relation to broader effects of identification field.

#### *Transnational community as mutual-aid networks*

Intensification of personal contacts and reintegration of communal links across borders and in an intercontinental perspective, does not merely serve as a space of communication and debate, but also provides a network-type structure for social, psychological and economic support among migrants. This can be called mutual aid and it refers to the types of social relations that while not necessarily based on the actual family ties, serve as primary group contact, or, as we have seen above, as a “substitution of a broader family”. One interviewee, a woman who emigrated to Paris, was asked what those contacts with other émigrés meant to her and how she benefited from them. She responded:

- Today it is friendship first and foremost. We know that we can count on one another somehow. And we feel very well together. When we get together we leave all our complexes behind. Sometimes these are very simple things. M. [her son – M.S.] submitted documents to pursue further studies, a PhD in computer science communication, or something like that. (...) So I called Karol and ask him whether he could support my son. He said: “of course, no problem, tell him to call me”. You know, I don't know if he'll support him, perhaps it's not necessary, but I know I can call Karol. Then, I called a friend of mine in San Francisco and told her that my children wanted to come and whether she could host them. “No problem”, she responded. (...) I asked Pawel if my children can stay at his mother's

place when they come to Los Angeles. Again: "No problem". If somebody needs something from we, they will give me a call. You know, we certainly help each other somehow.

This mutual support is certainly facilitated by the development of means of communication (printed and online journals, blogs, mailing lists etc.). The opening article of the first issue of the *Reunion 68* bulletin (December 1994) stated that it is "an attempt to reconstruct that which had been broken so suddenly" and its editor-in-chief wrote: "We represent a group of several thousand people. Let our bulletin reflect our past, present and help us to prepare for the future. Let it touch upon all aspects of our lives and let it reach even the most distant places in the world" (ibid.). A reader of the bulletin suggested that it should serve a similar role as "Polish supplement to Folks Sztyme [a Yiddish newspaper in communist Poland – M.S.], and inform about what is going on, weddings, anniversaries, grandchildren's births, occupational and sport achievements, professional cooperation offers, exchanging apartments during holidays etc." (no. 2, fall 1995).

### *Tensions over definition and interpretation of identity resources*

Diasporic situation means specific effects of identification field with regard to the overlapping of various forms and contents of identity resources and their meaning in similarity/difference establishment and signification. This is the case of the relationship between émigrés and those who never emigrated. This is also the case of the relationship between the post-1968 diaspora and Polish migrant communities (Polonia), local Jewish communities and even people from other Polish-Jewish emigration waves. Being seen as simply "coming from Poland" and not recognized as a Jew is seen as somewhat troublesome. As one man who considers himself a cosmopolitan (has lived in 8 countries following the 1968 exodus) with strong attachment to Israel and his "Polish Jewishness" explained:

- I am definitely not a Pole (...) Poland for me is (...) yet another country in Europe where I was accidentally born (...) but I have a strong attachment to my childhood and my city – Łódź, to Polish songs of that period, my friends (...) I know that I am a Polish Jew, I am proud of it, but I am by no means a Pole. I think that most Polish people would agree with me. When I meet Poles I usually don't have this problem with identity because I say that I am a Jew and they accept it as a fact. But there is a bigger problem with Americans and others, because when I tell them I am not a Pole, they disagree with me and are always ready to dispute: "you were born in Poland, so you are a Pole".

The "Polish"-versus-"Jewish" tension might occur in political or organizational contexts. For instance, one of the interviewees, who was a co-founder of the Committee to Support Solidarity in early 1980's in Copenhagen said he had been distrusted by Polish (non-Jewish) activists because of his Jewish origin, but at the same time he was treated with skepticism by some Jewish émigrés who did not like his involvement in Polish matter ("attachment to the white-and-red option" as he referred

to). Other moments of signifying difference (otherness) happen in the context of Polish migrant organizations whenever antisemitic prejudice is expressed in the presence of those Jews who are active in them or cooperate. One can see that it is not only a matter of identity resources valuation but a menace-effect type of mobilization of identity. Similar references were made to interdiasporic conflicts between the Jews (for instance in Denmark or Sweden) and Arab or Muslim communities (one person described an attempt at a violent attack on a store owned by a Jewish immigrant in Malmö by a group of Palestinian immigrants). As some interviewees reported, there have been moments of strengthening their loyalty to the State of Israel when anti-Israeli public demonstrations were organized or private opinions were expressed. Organized or individual counter-actions are often undertaken, such as pro-Israel rallies or defending legitimacy of Israel's policies in private conversations. One of the interviewees, a woman living in Sweden, gives her own example of the latter:

- I work in a charity organization that operates also in Israel and helps Palestinian children. So, because of this we have of course many discussions about what is going on there. One cannot be against anyone who wants to give aid that is given to mentally handicapped children. If I had anything against such aid I would not have worked there. But these people from my organization who work there they have anti-Israel attitude. (...) You know, I am the only one who would like to be able to say something positive about Israel. But it's also not so very easy, especially given the fact that my boss is a very domineering man and he talks a lot and loudly. So I started a discussion about the right of Israel. Ignorance about Israel's situation is terrible. So, even among employees of Swedish charity organizations who work there... they seem not to know how the refugee camps were created. They don't know that Arabs rejected the idea of Palestine's division into two states in the beginning, so it's not surprising that they think Israel is only violence and racism. (...) So, I try to discuss this and provide articles from the internet on this subject.

There are also tensions over evaluation of the remaining and recently reviving Jewish life in Poland. Some of the 1968-émigrés tend to diminish this religious and cultural revival and say that they are truly the "last generation of Polish Jews". They are often skeptical or reluctant about the reconstruction of orthodox and conservative forms of Judaism in Poland on the one hand, and criticize secular institutions (such as TSKŻ) especially for their collaboration with the communist authorities until late 1980's on the other. An immigrant who lives in Copenhagen reveals his skepticism:

- All this is somewhat strange, artificial (...) Of course, there are some fine people there [in Poland] (...) but all this is somehow far-fetched. These congregations won't survive. In my opinion all this will collapse at some point. (...) Besides, most of these people are already from mixed marriages.

Another problem relates to the in-group status of people with differing forms of cultural capital (identity resources). It is right to say that transnational networks and reunion meetings create a space that integrates people of very diverse background: those of communist parents and those

from anti-communist circles, those who were socialized to learn traditions of Judaism and those whose socialization were atheist and non-traditional, those who attended Jewish schools and summer camps and those whose peer groups were located completely outside those Jewish circles, those from assimilated urban intelligentsia families and those from Yiddish-speaking neighborhoods in Lower Silesia's small towns etc. However, some participants of those networks express concern over potentially disproportionate distribution of those identity resources that constitute spectacular signs of Jewishness (knowledge of Yiddish or Hebrew, traditional/religious education, biographic experiences and social linkages reaching back to Jewish summer camps, family links in Israel etc.) and that certain "lack" of those forms of symbolic capital might marginalize them within the group. A respondent now living in Sweden who comes from a "mixed" family of non-Jewish mother and assimilated Jewish communist father, says:

- Since I (...) don't know Yiddish or Hebrew – I've started to learn Hebrew – I am somehow on a margin. But I decided to continue to work on this, so that I can fully belong to this group.

Apart from these, often unspoken, in-group tensions, a number of people in Copenhagen referred to a conflict of post-1968 emigres with the local orthodox Jewish congregation that would refuse to bury people with only Jewish father (i.e. non-Halakhically Jewish) as well as non-Jewish spouses of the synagogue members in a Jewish cemetery. A number of people joined the congregation regardless of their actual views (some claimed they were atheist) in order to struggle against this form of exclusion that denied Jewish identity to those whose Jewish origin was the basis for persecutions and stigmatization prior to emigration.

### *Learning within, between and beyond identities*

Even though the members 1968-émigrés community have retained strong links to Polish culture and language, the experience of antisemitic stigmatization and coercive pressures that made them leave Poland caused identification shift from "Polish" to "Jewish" that was already observed in a sociological study in Sweden in 1980's (Ilicki 1988). Therefore much of what can be described as a process of "identity negotiation" in terms of learning one's position in cultural and multiethnic structures of his or her country of destination, relates to preservation and reconstruction of Jewishness, and is considered both a task and a challenge. Already in the late 1970's this question was posed in the Coordination Committee's bulletin *Kontakt i dialog*: "We are not Poles. We are not Scandinavians. We are not Jews. Poles call us Jews (...) Scandinavians describe us 'polska judar'. We are Jews in emotional sense and sometimes only because we are given this name in a certain context. Each of us has his own conception of Jewishness and defends it passionately. (...) Our



parents did not pass tradition or religion on to us. We know much more about the Roman Catholic Church than about our forefathers' history. (...) For 5,000 years we have been The NATION. If we are able to pass Jewish identification on to our children, there is a chance that we may stay The Nation. That's what I wish for us – Scandinavian citizens of Polish origin and of Jewish nationality" (Olszewski, 1993).

There are at least four dimensions of Jewishness that can be reconstructed based on the analysis of diasporic discourses. One is a common understanding of Jewish "community of fate" that links the centuries-long history of Jewish ambivalence (marginalization and achievements) with the émigrés' own experiences: being a second generation of the Holocaust survivors and being refugees from an authoritarian state. Another dimension is a turn towards "roots" in Judaism and Jewish cultural heritage, which can be described in terms of constructed tradition. This refers to learning holiday rituals, studying historical texts and Jewish languages and maintaining a common "universe of discourse" where this quest of rootedness can be negotiated with essentially modern modes of socialization. A significant role in this turn to postfigurative cultural world is played by the migrants' children who appear as informal "teachers" of tradition that they themselves acquired in Jewish schools in various countries of residence. This is a paradoxical "prefigurative moment" in cultural transmission, where the old ones learn from the young about the world and life which they were taught relatively little by their parents. Perhaps this is why the third mode of "identity learning" becomes more and more prominent, that is, state-national loyalty to Israel<sup>20</sup>. Standing in defense of the Jewish state or taking part in reunion meetings in Israel intended to be an expression of this national support provides those whose engagement in Jewish matters is otherwise minimal with a connection to Jewishness (even though there are strong tendencies among Polish-Jewish migrants to differentiate between "Jewish" and "Israeli" contexts). Finally, and not necessarily in contradiction to the nationalist orientation, the diasporic condition can be characterized in terms of ambivalence concerning the notions of "homeland" or "roots". Specific forms cosmopolitanism, resulting from frequent displacements and transnational family links, are being combined with Jewishness understood as "portable roots" (Gruber 1998). In some cases this multicultural location is interpreted as enriching and eventually an unproblematic factor of one's experience: "So since March [1968] I am still a Jew. I graduated from high school and began university in Israel, I continued my studies in Frankfurt and Florence, I live in Italy and have an Italian wife and Italian son. To the question "What are you?" I sometimes answer that I am Italian, at other times I am a Polish Jew, and very rarely –

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though it happens – that I’m Polish. And, truly speaking, I am only one of thousands of people who operate in several languages and several cultures. It is a type that has existed since the beginning of Europe. Communists and fascists dislike it very much. The emigrants of ’68 had a chance to become such people. Many of us never broke contacts with Poland. (...) So we won a lottery ticket. Thanks to general Moczar I became a true cosmopolitan” (Goldkorn 1998).

As Brah argues, “the concept of diaspora offers a critique of discourses of fixed origins, while taking account of a homing desire. The homing desire, however, is not the same as the desire for a ‘homeland’. Contrary to general belief, not all diasporas sustain an ideology of return. Moreover, the multi-placedness of home in the diasporic imaginary does not mean that diasporian subjectivity is ‘rootless’. I argue for a distinction between ‘feeling at home’ and declaring a place as home. Processes of diasporic identity formation are exemplars *par excellence* of the claim that identity is always plural, and in process” (Brah 1996: 197). The learning and identity-negotiating attempts discussed above seem to be therefore strategies for retaining one’s distinctiveness and pursuing “a dream of belonging”, reclaiming one’s formative past but recognizing the opportunities of under-determined present and future. At the same time, however, while these attempts are substantially a part of middle-class lifestyle and cultural consumption, those émigrés whose economic status makes such activity unaffordable in terms of leisure time shortage or high cost of international trips might indeed be excluded from this form of community participation. Having noticed this and acknowledging the tensions created by historical forces and biographical tragedies, one might conclude however that transnational locality of post-1968 Polish-Jewish community is where Zygmunt Bauman’s figures of “wanderer” and “tourist” (1998, 2000) come together in search of one’s “placedness” and in a struggle against not merely identification *fields* but against their oppressive operation as nationalist and ethnicized or racialized identification *regimes*. This transnational locality carries thus both an ambivalence of positions created by modernity as well as possibilities and uncertainties of contemporary “globalized” experience.

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